

David Alan Mittell

David Alan Mittell, 97, of Plymouth, formerly of Duxbury, Brookline and Jamaica Plain, died at Newfield House in Plymouth on May 28. He was born at Faulkner Hospital, Jamaica Plain, on January 22, 1918, the son of Carl L. and Edythe Mariani Mittell.

In 1935, he graduated from Roxbury Latin School in West Roxbury, where he was captain of hockey and tennis. His subsequent athletic career was not his greatest achievement, but was nonetheless remarkable. On Feb. 26, 1938, he became the only goaltender in Harvard hockey history to thwart Yale twice on the same day. That afternoon, as the junior varsity goalie, he excelled in a 2-2 tie. After the game coach Joe Stubbs told him he would start for the varsity that night. He would lead Harvard to a rousing 5-4 victory.

After college he became an "A" squash player. In Duxbury, he was the 10-time men's singles tennis champion at the Duxbury Yacht Club. His matches in 1953 and '54 against the gifted, much younger Billy Green, were epic. Billy won the first match in three sets. In 1954, at age 36, Mittell took the rematch in two sets.

Between sets he would go to a corner of Court 1 and light up an unfiltered Philip Morris cigarette — a pack-and-a-half a day habit. When his fellow goaltender Goodie Harding, an Olympian, died of lung cancer, he went cold turkey on March 31, 1955. He played tennis until he was 88.

In the 1930s the Mittells of Jamaica Plain made the long drive along what are now Routes 53, 3A and 6A to spend a couple of weeks in Chatham. Mittell's introduction to Duxbury came by accident. As a freshman at Harvard he was assigned a tutorial-for-the-challenged with Bud Hutton, who said, "Dave, I can't believe you've never been to Duxbury!"

It was love at first sight. Soon, his parents were renting in Duxbury, as was his older brother Ken. It was also love at first sight when he met Mary Louise Boss, who came to Duxbury summers from Providence, at a party given by his Jamaica Plain mate, Alec Stohn, and his future wife Mary Casey.

In Winthrop House at Harvard, Messrs. Hutton and Mittell shared a connecting suite with Jack and Joe Kennedy and Ben Smith. Mittell liked Jack. He did not like Joe. He recalled Joe senior addressing an economics seminar. "He had a brilliant mind." A take on old Joe one doesn't hear today.

After graduating from Harvard in June 1939, Mittell went to work for Lawrence R. McCoy, Co., wholesale lumber merchants, in Worcester. "I'll give it until the Harvard-Yale game," he said. He remained in the trade for 51 years. But throughout his life he paid little mind to the Christian, Jewish or Chinese calendars. The year was divided into "Before the Harvard-Yale game" and "After the Harvard-Yale game." Completely ethical in business and in life, he also never got over the belief that people who went to the right schools and were in the right clubs must be ethical. This occasionally led to his being taken advantage of. Perhaps without realizing he was talking about himself, he once said, "When a dishonest person cheats an honest person it's no big deal. The honest person is always vulnerable to the dishonest person."

By 1963 it was apparent that Mittell's lifelong friend, golfing partner and competitor, Bud Knight, was the leading candidate to be the next president of L.R. McCoy. That year he took his encyclopedic knowledge of where in North America on any day the best lumber could be had for the best price to Davenport, Peters — a Boston firm dating to 1811. He and Bud Knight never missed a golf game, never stopped sharing the deepest of confidences.

Late in life, when one of the nonprofits he served was going for a grant, Mittell was obliged to create his first known resume. He listed 11 corporate directorships and an astonishing 21 nonprofit trusteeships. The latter included countless chairmanships, executive committees, subcommittees and secretaryships.

Among the trusteeships were Children's Hospital, the Center for Blood Research, Dexter School in Brookline, the Historic Winslow House in Marshfield, Harvard Student Agencies, Plimoth Plantation, the Shirley-Eustis House in Roxbury, and, from 1954 until his death, Roxbury Latin School in West Roxbury.

Mittell was the devoted husband of Mary Louise (Boss) Mittell for nearly 74 years. He was the father of David A. Mittell, Jr. of Jamaica Plain and Duxbury; the late Stephen Boss Mittell; Jonathan B. Mittell of Watertown; Betsey M. Houghton and her husband Robert of Plymouth; and Nicholas G. Mittell of Roslindale. He was the grandfather of Winslow Houghton and his wife Lillian of Moab, Utah; and Dr. Haley D. Oates and her husband Matthew (deceased) of Lansing, Mich.

Donations in Mr. Mittell's memory may be made to Roxbury Latin School, 101 St. Theresa Avenue, West Roxbury MA 02132. At his request services and burial in Mayflower Cemetery in Duxbury are private.